They're Sharing a Drink They Call Loneliness (but it's better than drinking alone)

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Todd Anderson/Neil Perry

Characters:
Todd Anderson, Neil Perry (Dead Poets Society), Charlie Dalton, Jeff Anderson, Original Child Character(s), Chris Noel, Knox Overstreet, Steven Meeks, Gerard Pitts, Richard Cameron, Original Female Character(s), Todd Anderson's Parents, Ginny Danburry

Additional Tags:
heavily based on piano man, Fluff and Angst, no happy ending neil dies, POV Todd Anderson, Todd Anderson Needs A Hug, Gay Todd Anderson, Writer Todd Anderson, i have a pen name for himmm, Gay Neil Perry (Dead Poets Society), Neil Perry Needs a Hug, bartender neil perry because piano man, also SO MANY billy joel refrences, will edit tags&characters as the story goes on, todd and chris are roomates because i said so, neil is like the elephent in that myth i cant remember where i heard about, Many animal metaphors

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by Sophie1126jane

Summary

My nephew used to ask when I was happy the most. He was maybe four or five - I'm not sure how my brother managed to grow such a philosopher - and for a while it was repetitive once he got sick of "What's you favourite colour?" And, "Why did your parents named you Todd?"
I told him it was my 13th birthday, or the day I finished high school, but he kept on asking.
Finally I said it was a few months in the autumn of 87', when I met one of my best friends.
He asked me then what's his name, probably sensing the truth in my words, and I answered simply, Neil Perry.

or
idk its based on piano man tho kinda
and maybe gonna be similar to before sunrise
idk

Notes

helloooo hruu
first i gotta say that english is not my first language, and im so sorry for any grammar/spelling mistakes
seond
second i kinda wrote it all and it was deleted somehow and i hate my life. yay. and this chapter is SUPER short
gklofsidoa i hate it all
also, HF in the end stands for Hans Fox (todd's pen name) (ill explain in one of the chapters i swear)

kinda thats it
hope youd enjoy and come back when theres an actual chapter and not those few lines
im gonna try and write the next one asap

byee take caree <33

Chapter 1: Famous Last Words

It took him a three hour walk around his neighbourhood, two glasses of whisky, and one mental breakdown to get himself to sit down and write.

He missed those months when the words were a never a well that never ran dry, but his muse died years ago, and now he couldn't write a good book in less than two years.
But now his mind was fuzzy, and words were all around him, as if a ghost stood behind him, one hand on his shoulder, the other brushing his hair and stroking his face.

he leaned into that touch, thinking where to begin.

Well, obviously he could start with September of 87' - that was the beginning after all - but it didn't feel right.
He already had his friends' permission to write about them, even though they said he didn't have to ask, so all he had left was actually writing.
He sighed. He was thirsty, but he didn't want the clouds in his brain to change.

AUTHOR'S NOTE *, he typed instead, and he knew what to do, where to start.*

***

Genuinely, this is my most reality based book. Every event in it happened to me or my friends, which also makes it my hardest book to write.
Take it as a memoir, autobiography, evil origin story or whatever you'd like, but I just see it as the unfortunate truth.
All names/people/events in this story are true.

I'm going to try and tell this story as best as I can, but in the end I'm just one man with one pair of eyes. I tried to ask other people how they saw it, but I'm afraid we are missing the most important point of view in the story.

Dedicated to my muse,
I love you forever,
H.F

Chapter 2: Scenes from an Italian Restaurant

Chapter Notes

heyyyy
wanna thank my dear beta reader Lucy (she doesnt have ao3 unfortenatly)

chapter title was supose to be a billy joel referrance but i couldnt find anything good enough (,:
uh, take care and all
hope you'll enjoy

i'll try to post every week! im starting school monday so i'll probably write in class and stuff

See the end of the chapter for more notes

My nephew used to ask when I was happy the most.
He was maybe four or five - I'm not sure how my brother managed to grow such a philosopher - and for a while it was repetitive once he got sick of "What's you favourite colour?" And, "Why did your parents named you Todd?"
I told him it was my 13th birthday, or the day I finished high school, but he kept on asking.

Finally I said it was a few months in the autumn of 87', when I met one of my best friends. He asked me then what's his name, probably sensing the truth in my words, and I answered simply, *Neil Perry*.

I showed him a picture of the two of us, and he gasped.
"You're young!" He called, leaning on my chest. I was glad - it was late, and his eyes were heavy, and it meant no more questions.

I laughed silently, though, and patted his head. "I was 24."
"How old're you now?"
"Thirty."

He yawned. "He's pretty."
"He was," I nodded.
"Where's he?"
"Far."
"Why?"
"I dont know, buddy. He didn't tell me."

DAY I DAY 0

It's nine o'clock on a Tuesday, and the bar was full. Maybe it had something to do with the guy playing melodies on the saxophone, or the cold autumn evening that begged you find a place to sit, honestly I didn't care. The bar was full, and there were too many people, and I hoped the earth will open and swallow me.

I kept my eyes on the yellow paperback book I grabbed before leaving my apartment, knowing I couldn't start writing my book this day.

I needed a story. Desperately. And this place didn't help me think, but I couldn't bring myself to leave either, because my small apartment was too cold and too dark, and the only way my knuckles wouldn't freeze in the shape of holding a pen is if I would wear damn gloves. So I stayed, staring at the pages of the novel, breaking my atheism with a silent pray for ideas or a distraction.

It came to me in the shape of a question, and immediately I wanted to take it back.
"Gonna order anything?"

Please god, take it back.

Especially because nothing was the same anymore after i looked up. Especially because I *looked up*, and the male voice was closer than I thought, and his big brown eyes speared me.

I stared for a moment - I couldn't not to, he was beautiful - but his smile became too amused too fast and I might have stared longer than I realised, so I quickly came back to reality.
"N- no. I, uh, n- no."
He raised his eyebrow, so I held up my still half full glass to show him. He nodded. It didn't go too bad.

The bartender turned to look at the guy that was still playing, and so I took another look in him, telling myself I would use his description for my main character.

He was supposed to look ordinary - soft brown hair, brown eyes.
You've seen hundreds of guys like it.
But he was different.
I can't put my finger on it, but I think it was something in his eyes, or maybe smile, as he clapped and shouted to the player something I

couldn't quite understand once people started talking louder. I didn't really listen anyway, it wasn't any of my business. But his smile was wide, and his eyes full of life. He must've been the most alive person I've ever seen.

I guess sometimes the irony just loves holding us by the throat and hit our heads against the wall.

He turned to my direction as the player guy collapsed into the seat beside me, so I quickly returned my eyes to the book, not actually reading.
They spoke about books, and music and sports, I remember, until the bartender looked at his watch. "Freedom!" He called, and the player guy yawped. Five minutes later they were out of sight.

DAY I

For our story I'm going to pretend it took me more than 21 hours to come back to the bar.
Let's say... 72?

Now I had a notebook with me - it was grass green with with blue *forget-me-nots* all over it, my favourite to this day.
Back in September of 1987, that notebook was still empty.

We could argue that the main reason I came back was that guy, the bartender, but the place itself was warm and welcoming enough to make me want to stay.
He was there, though, he was *right there*, probably less than two feet away.

I sat where I did the day before.
The saxophone guy was playing again.
I opened the notebook and tried to write that idea I had when I came back home last night - maybe here it will drip out, words coming through black ink and hand movements.

"Nice jacket,"
My eyes shot up at the bartender, then down again on my jacket, then back at him. "Thanks," I managed to reply.
It was a leather jacket I bought when I was in high school, and somehow was still a little too big for me.

He sat down, his eyes - golden under the yellow lights - not leaving

my face. I doubt any of us back then knew why he did, I just know that if you would've asked me in November, I would've said it was the best thing that happened to me.

He smiled. "Saw you here yesterday," He said. "I like the book you read."
"Oh," I said, "it was-"
"To Kill a Mockingbird, yeah," the bartender nodded. "It's a great book."

We were both silent for a moment. It felt like long five minutes, but it was probably less than ten seconds.
The silence wasn't awkward, though, it was just there.

"My name's Neil," He said. *Neil* said.
Neil. It suited him. I remember once looking at meanings of names for a book i wrote - it was my first novel, and just before I decided on a pen name.
The name *Neil* means "passionate", "champion", or "cloud"
The first two fitted him, at least.

"I'm Todd,"

Chapter End Notes

well. plot is happening
hope you enjoyedd

next chapter will be longer, i promise

byee take care and stufff <33

Chapter 3: Through the Long Night

Chapter Notes

> Wanna thank my dear friend Nyx who read this chapter and helped me choose the namee
> Ty nyx□□
>
> Also like sofjsoxsnd ughhh i hate that the first time chris appears she's talking abput boys im so sorryyy i thought about her character in this fic btw she has a backstory and all
>
> Hope you'll enjoyyy

See the end of the chapter for more notes

"You're back late," Chris commented, grinning, as I walked through the door.

God knows why she was awake. It was past midnight - 01:36 said the watch on my wrist, and I swear I could feel my jaw dropping. I left more than seven hours ago for a walk.

"Were you on a date?"

"Yes, I was on a date," I rolled my eyes, throwing my jacket on a chair as I sat beside her on the couch. "We went to his place and we- No, I wasn't on a date."

Chris leaned closer, her lilac nail polish clear against my brown sweater as she grabbed my shoulder. "But you were with someone, weren't you?"

"Yes," I replied, then, "god, you really want me to be in a relationship that much?"

"School is awful, I live through you." She pulled back her hair, warping it with a hair tie I didn't notice before. "So? Who was it?"

"A friend."

"What friend?"

"A friend," I shrugged. "You don't know him."

Chris grinned. "You have four days."

"Until what?"

"Until you fall for him. Help me with that question?"

DAY 1

the streets were empty, and cool breeze stroke my hair. Neil was beside me, explaining about an actor he liked.

So far I knew basic stuff about him:

-favourite colour? Green

-full name? Neil Perry

-worked in the bar as part time job. His friend Charlie is playing there most of the nights, and he needed the money

-He studied medicine, and he hated it. ("Why? It sounds interesting." I commented. He leaned his head on his head on his hands - then we were still in the bar, and he found a moment to sit with me - and he pressed his hands on his eyes. "Sometimes. I just really don't like it.")

-He really liked theatre, which is why we were now talking now about actors.

"Jack Nicholson's good, too," Neil said. "Watched The Shining a few months ago, it was terrifying,"

"Oh, I watched it with my brother in theatres," I said. "The book is much better, you should read the book,"

Neil laughed silently. "Respectfully, I'd rather kill myself."

"No, that's fair," I said, "it's great, though."

"Then maybe I'll read it someday."

I tourned to him. "I- I have a copy. You can borrow it, if- if you want..."

His eyes met mine, and he smiled. "Great. Now I have an excuse to see you again."

"Oh,"

I could feel my heart beating, could feel my face on fire.

The thing is, Chris had probably gave me too much time. Four days? Looking back, all i needed was that first look at him, because he really was different. He was a friend, but he wasn't like any of my other friends. It wasn't even like those two and a half hours when I was 12 and Robert Redford was on the screen of our TV.

It was something in between, and at the same time, it was something more - I think we both knew it the moment our eyes met.

Sometimes I think about him, and then I think about that myths where all humans had two pairs of hands and legs, and two heads. Zeus, fearing they will learn their abilities, separated each one to two people, and now we are wondering on earth, trying to find our other half.

It was stupid, especially because I'm telling you this now when in reality I realised I felt like this about him only months later, but somehow in my lovesick brain it wasn't as corny, I swear.

"So you write horror?" Neil asked suddenly. The silence was probably only seconds long.

"N- no," I shook my head. "I mean, maybe? I'm not sure what genre it is."

"Anything I'd know?"

Praying he never read it, i replied, "well... my first novel is called Elysium..."

Neil's eyes widened, and he stopped. "My friend Knox got me this for my birthday!"

"Should I thank him for the money?" I asked, and he laughed. "I have to read it now,"

"You really don't,"

"Oh, yes, I do," He decided, "I'll write down notes."

I sighed. "Of course you will,"

Back home I found the piece of paper Neil gave me, the one with his number. ("Call me tomorrow?" Neil asked, and I nodded, promising I will.)

Chris was in her room, studying to the test she apparently had the next day, and I sat on the couch, reading my yellow paperback copy of To Kill a Mockingbird while messing with the paper, careful to not rip it.

DAY 2

"You didn't call," Neil stated the moment I was close enough to hear him.

It was my third day in a row spending my evening in the bar, and at some point I got worried that Neil was just an hallucination my brain made, and I'm actually an alcohol addicted or something.

"I know," I said, sitting down, "I'm sorry,"

"Why didn't you call?" He turned to me, ignoring a man who tried to buy a drink.

"I- I'm sorry, I meant to, but-" anything I was going to say would've sounded like an excuse. The thing is? Neil wasn't mad. He genuinely wanted to know the reason, and it made me want to cry. I think I was afraid he'd think I'm pathetic.

I meant to call him, I really did - specifically around three in the afternoon, when he told me he'll be home. I held the phone in one hand, his number in the other, and the only reason I didn't it that-

"I panicked, I'm sorry," I buried my face in my hands.

He laughed.

He fucking laughed, and I hoped the earth would eat me alive. "You panicked?"

"Neil,"

"I- god, sorry," He laughed - not in mockery, but in... amusement, I'd like to say. "Why did you panic?"

"I- I don't know, I'm not good at this,"

"At calling people?"

"Stop laughing at me," I rolled my eyes. "I brought the book."

"What book?" Now he was half listening, and I watched him working.

"The Shining."

I smiled as his eyes widened. "You did?"

"I did."

He checked his watch. "I'm done in ten minutes," He said. "If you wanna wait-"

"I- I can wait,"

"Great. Ten minutes, then."

He walked close, and his long coat brushed against my leg whenever he moved.

"This is great, thanks," Neil said. Tonight he had his glasses on, and the lights in the street reflected on it each time he looked at me. And he looked at me a lot. "I'll read it the moment I finish your book."

"And there I dared to think you'd forget about it," I sighed.

"Come on, I'm sure it's great," He shoved me.

I groaned. "I hate you."

"Yeah, totally," Neil nodded, "that's why you're coming to see me... let's see, three times already?"

"I hate you," I repeated, and he laughed.

"Maybe you could give me your number," Neil suggested after some time. "You know, so I could call you."

"Uh, sure," I said, looking in my pockets for a piece of paper, then I wrote the number, handing it to him. Neil took the pen, writing above it, "Toddie ♡"

"Great," He said, grinning, "I'll call you,"

Chapter End Notes

Short chapter
Ugh
But
I think the next chapter maybe probably will be longer *crossing my fingers*

Byeee
Take care and all~

Chapter 4: Sleeping With the Television on

Chapter Notes

no beta we die like neil perry (yeah he dies in this if it wasnt clear) (not this chapter but later)

so sorry if theres any spelling or grammer mistakes-

anyway jeff apears kind of✧
also help its so funny because the end of the chapter is literally today (19.09)
also i'll write the next chapter when its rosh hashanah, my year goes with their's💔

anyway hope you'll enjoy thiss

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The next three weeks were, with all the honesty, some of the best in my life.
It was like those days in September were simply just good. Not only to me, just good.

Having the same amount of free time and five times the muse, I wrote almost one hundred and fifty pages.

Chris, her studies probably eased a bit, begged I'll watch The Breakfast Club with her after the shocking reveal that I have never watched it.
To pay her back, we watched Stand By Me the next evening.
I'm not sure when I fell asleep, but I am sure that Chris was still awake when the movie ended.
When I woke up the next morning, the television was still playing - now the news channel. Chris was sleeping beside me on the couch, and the light coming through the window made her look almost angelic. Her hair, blonde over the blue of the pillow, looked like gold.

In the day time, I saw Neil three times - Wednesday, from early afternoon to the late night hours.
I met his friends in small beats, and then all at once.

Charlie, obviously, was the first. He got out of his room one day when Neil and I were in their apartment. Neil fell asleep on my shoulder, and Charlie looked at me, then at Neil, then again at me, and he smirked. "Hey," He said simply, "how you're doing?"

Second was Knox, who whined to Neil about a girl who learned with him whom he was "completely and unbearably in love with"
Neil, who was still working, pretended - pretty well - to listen.
The girl talking went on for eight minutes or so, and then he noticed me.
"Knox Overstreet," He said, slightly embarrassed.

I met Meeks and Pitts one of those Wednesdays. The books in one of Pitts' hands told me they were probably on their way from the library.
"Neil!" He called from across the street. I noticed his other hand separating from Meeks' to wave. "Who's you friend?"
"It's Todd!" Neil called back. "You'll meet him on Friday!"

"Short one's Steven Meeks, tall one's Gerard Pitts," He explained when they left.
"What's on Friday?" I asked.

Neil stopped, his hands coming to hold me by the shoulders. "Right," He said, "forgot to ask you. The guys're coming over, I really want you to come,"
Oh.
"Who- who's coming?" I asked

"Meeks and Pitts," He said, his hands slowly loosening the grip in my shoulders, his face red. "Knox, too, and Cameron. You know Cameron? I don't think you've met. He- Richard Cameron, he's a nice guy, don't listen to anything Charlie says about him."
"Alright," I nodded.
"So you'll come?"
"Y- yeah, alright."
He smiled. "Great," He said.

"Todd, it's for you!" Chris called.

I put down my green forget-me-nots notebook - it was now almost completely full with the first part of my novel- and I came out to the living room.

"Who's this?"
"Jeff," she said, touching my shoulder softly. "I'll go read in the park."
I almost wanted to ask her to join.

The thing is, conversions with my brother usually ended up with the both of us yelling, or worse - me yelling and crying while he's playing

the part of the sane brother. Could've been worse, I guess.

My relationship with Jeff was at this moment probably the best we ever had.
I remember when I was a kid - four or five, maybe - and I adored him. My feeling towards him were later replaced with hate, that he seemed to annoyingly understand and blame on our parents. In those years - 1980 to late 1987 - I could almost like him. Didn't mean I enjoyed those conversations with him, though.

"You're coming tomorrow?" He asked when he heard me on the other side.
"What's tomorrow?"
Jeff was silent for three good seconds. "Are you serious?"

Looking around for a calendar we don't have, I said, "it's either your birthday or rosh ha-"
"Thank god, you don't have dementia," Jeff sighed dramatically.
"You're coming?"

I made a list of pros and cons in my head. "Will mum and dad be there?" I asked eventually, and I could hear the eye roll in his voice.
"Of course they'll be there,"

"Then I'm not coming. Bye,"

"Todd."
"What?"
"You're such a hypocrite," He said. "Half of your career is based on your name, you realise that? And how you called yourself? *Hans Fox*."

"You'd have never realise that if i didn't tell you," I muttered.

"Doesn't matter." He said. "You could've called yourself anything else. Hell, you could've called yourself Jacob, isn't he one of the brothers Grimm?"
"Yeah,"
"You're coming tomorrow," Jeff decided. "you can't avoid them forever."

I was silent.

Deleting parents from my list of cons, I was left with no other argument.
I sighed. "Johnny'll be there?"
"I mean, until he'll fall asleep," Jeff said, probably shrugging, "You're

serious that you'll come only for my son?"
"Yes."
"Ooch,"

"Suck it," I said, then, "I need to go."
Jeff laughed. "Alright, alright, go write your masterpiece,"

That Friday Neil was talking about - it was less than a week before my conversation with Jeff - came quickly. Maybe it was because it was only a few days after Neil asked me to come, but it was still fast.
I remember standing outside the apartment for some time - not less than five minutes, I think - and tried to convince myself to knock.

Neil did not change his mind, I told myself. *He called you in midnight to make sure you know the address, he didn't change his mind.*

Knox found me. He gave me a confused look, saying, "you good? Why didn't you come in?"
I shrugged. He opened the door, stepping in.

Charlie was sitting on the couch, playing a soft melody on the sax that didn't seem to bother Meeks and Pitts, who were sitting right beside him.

"We're last?" Knox asked, sitting down.
"Yup." Charlie said. "Neil's in his room, probably still losing his mind over the fact that Todd's here,"

It was probably the moment Meeks noticed me, because he said, causing me to ignore Charlie's knowing grin. "I'm sorry, my name's Steven Meeks,"
"Todd Anderson," I replied, silently, slightly overwhelmed by how many people were in the apartment, that was barely bigger than the one I lived in (the answer was seven, by the way).

Charlie got up, physically pulling me to the couch, and my face were on fire when Pitts introduced himself to me. I nodded politely. Now - when he was a few feet away, and not the other side of the street - Pitts looked a bit like Sam Waterston.

Neil sat beside me, and our sides touched - legs, arms, shoulders, pressed together. He was wearing a green sweater. He looked good.
"You look good," I found myself whispering.
Neil laughed. His face were slightly red, but it could've been the

warmth. It was a warm day.
"What happened to hello?" He asked, "Good to see you?"
"Sorry," I muttered, my face flushing.
Neil shoved me a little, and he smiled. "It's alright," He said, "you look good, too,"
"Thanks,"

The evening went overall well. Neil's friends are nice.

Knox, who was studying law, apparently knew Chris, and when I asked what he thinks of her he looked like those cartoons, hearts replacing eyes.

When Pitts left to take a glass of water, Meeks turned to me. "So," He asked, "what do you do?"
"I- I'm sorry, what?"
"Like, in life?" He clarified.
"Oh," I said, "I, uh, I'm a writer,"
"Mh, cool,"
"What, uh, wh- what about you?"

"Right now, mostly privet lessons," Meeks said, moving a little so Pitts could sit back beside him. "How d'you meet Neil, then?"
"What he said?" I heard Pitts whispering.
"Writer," Meeks replied.

"We, uh, we met in a bar," I said.
"Mh, cool,"
"I guess,"

Later they decided to watch a movie. And by they I mean that Charlie decided that he's bored, and that they should watch a movie together, because, "we're all here, let's not waste it, c'mone, let's give Toddie a good impression,"

I dont know. I think he was bored.

Charlie got up to look through five or four tapes that were thrown in a drawer beneath the television, and Neil pulled me again close to him. I'm not sure when we were even pulled apart, but it was nice being beside him again. He was warm, and he smelled nice, and there was overall something about him that made me not wanting to move.

His hand was still gripping my arm, and our sides pressed together. I

didn't bother to pull away - his touch was soft.

"So," Charlie said, sitting back down, "we got The Shining,"
"We're *not* watching The Shining." Neil said.
"Fine, sure," Charlie rolled his eyes. "Carrie?"
"Got anything that's not Stephen King?" Knox Complained.

"Yeah, Stephen Meeks's better anyway,"
Meeks laughed, and my eyes caught him hitting softly Pitts' arm.

"All Quiet on the Western Front?"
"Isn't it from the thirties?"
I could hear the eye roll in Meeks' voice. "79'." He said.

"We got - Meeks, see if there's anything on the TV -"
"yessir," He replied to Charlie.
"There's also Stand By Me, The Outsiders - Matt Dillon's so hot in this - and Rebel Without a Case,"

"So you have a problem with the thirties, but the fifties is fine?"
Meeks' eyes rolled again behind his glasses.
"You have jewish friends and dare to praise the thirties?" He gasped, "besides, it's Neil's fault,"
"How?" Neil asked defensively.
"James Dean's like, your biggest celebrity crush,"

"He's not," He turned to me, "I'm not gay,"

"Can we start the movie already?" Cameron asked.
Charlie rolled his eyes. "Gotta *choose* it first, Dickie,"
"Don't call me that-"
"I gotta go soon, can we just start *anything*?" Knox begged.

"Stand By Me's ninety minutes, I think," I whispered to Neil.
"You watched it?" He asked. I nodded. "It's a good movie,"

"Charlie," Neil said, patting his shoulder, "Todd's saying that Stand By Me's good,"
"Isn't that the one with the body and River Phoenix?"
"He's a good actor," Knox said, "hope nothing bad happens to him,"

"What can happen to him? Isn't he seventeen?" Cameron asked.
"James Dean was our age," Charlie shrugged and got up to play the movie.
Neil clutched his heart, "greatest loss," he whispered to me.

"Haven't watched that movie yet, by the way," I replied.

Richard Deyfuss' face appeared on the screen as Neil gasped dramatically. "I'll take care of that," He whispered, and I found myself smiling at the newspaper title.

Everyone left before eleven and a half, and Neil's hand still gripped my arm. "Wanna stay longer?" He asked, turning to look at me. His eyes looked golden from light and crying.
"Sure," I said, "you're alright?"

"Yeah," He laughed, "it was good, it was *really* good,"
"Yeah?"
"Yeah," Neil nodded. My arm was still in his hand. "Where's Charlie?" I asked

"His room, probably," Neil shrugged.
I grinned. "Maybe he's crying, too,"
"*Rude*,"

DAY 15
"Started reading your book,"
"I hate you."

We were now in his room, and I could feel his eyes on me as I looked around.

"It's good," he said. "You really wrote it?"
"Yeah," I looked at a few plays that were thrown on a desk, taking the place of notebooks that were on his bed and the floor, instead - mostly Shakespeare, some Wilde. Another one was Pygmalion.

"It doesn't have your name on it," He smiled at me when I turned.
"That's because I use a pen name," I leaned on his desk. His smile grew. "Yeah?"
"Some copies have photo," I added, not sure why. "Chris begged me to use it."
"Chris?"
"My roommate,"

"Oh," He nodded, picking up his copy. It was a hardcover. Patting on the spot beside him, asking me to sit, he asked, "Why d'you choose

Hans Fox?"

"What's wrong with Hans Fox?"
"Nothing wrong with Hans Fox, just unexpected,"
I sat beside him, and he looked up at me, and he smiled. His fingers brushed on the name before he put the book away again. "Why Hans Fox?"

"Well," I sighed, "I really like *The Fox and the Hound*,"

"It's a good movie," Neil agreed, still smiling.
"Yeah. Todd also means Fox, but that's marginal,"

He laughed, "ah, of course," now he turned, so he completely faced me, "and why Hans?"

I shrugged. "My last name is Anderson."
"Hans Christian Andersen?"
I nodded.

The almost identical last name was only part of the reason, actually. Another part was that he was gay, and I thought, *hey, why not?*

Another was the fact that when I was eighteen I thought it would be really funny to call myself after a guy who's second name was Christian, because I am very much not.

But my main reason, one that I told Neil that night, was The Ugly Duckling.
It was one of my favourite stories since i learned how to read - around six - and probably until I was ten.

Sometimes I think it's sad, knowing at that age that you worth less than your brother - 5.98$, if being specific - knowing that your parents prefer so obviously a boy that lives four hours from home. Like in the story, my brother was clearly better than I was. He was smarter, therefore he was better in school, and he was better at playing soccer, but he played soccer, so of course I had to, too, and he looked better, and had more confidence, so he had more friends, and people liked him more, and now he was married to a beautiful woman and had a beautiful kid with her, and maybe a dog too, when Johnny will be older.

I was crying now, and Neil looked at me with his big, sad, eyes.

"You're alright?" He asked softly.

I nodded, wiping my eyes. "Y- yeah," I said. "I just- I really wanted to be a swan, you know?"

Neil warped one arm around my shoulders, so I leaned into the touch. "You're great just like that, by the way," He whispered.
"Not really,"
"Yes really." His other hand went through my hair, and I buried my face in his neck. "Don't go and try to change, alright? You're awesome, I couldn't love you any better,"

Maybe, if I took a deep breath and thought about it at the moment,
"I want you just the way you are,"
I would've realised that I was deeply in love with him.
But I didn't.

"Hans Swan doesn't hit the same, anyway," Neil added, and I laughed.
I don't know, maybe if I did take a deep breath and thought about it, the story would've ended differently.

Chapter End Notes

yeah this is NOT a slow burn

anyway hope you liked it and are doing fine and happy :D
byebye and take care and all

Chapter 5: Leave a Tender Moment Alone

Chapter Notes

Posting this from my phone so i think the text's gonna look a little different💔💔

God that was faster than I thought-

Anyway rosh hashanah! Yay! (Not really💔)
Still cool that i wrote it the day it takes place it tho

Alsoalso Jeff's wife!! Shes cool i swear i just have no idea what journalists do so i couldn't write long about her work😓

Anyway hope you'll enjoy

See the end of the chapter for more notes

It was the twenty ninth day of Elul, and I spend my afternoon in a train carriage.

Those three hour rides were my only excuse to come over as little as possible, which meant around four times a year at most.

I took myself, a notebook, and a book, knowing that I'm going to spend more time on the train than with my family. Jeff suggested I'll stay the night, but I really didn't mind all the train rides. It was better than being longer than necessary with my parents, anyway, and it was easier to write when the sun was down.

"Hug for Nat?" Jeff asked, getting out of his car.

I rolled my eyes, but smiled. "Sure," I said, hugging him. "For Nat,"

"New car?" I asked once he started it, making the way to his house.

"Yeah," He replied, "Figured it's time, ya know? Wouldn't want to get

my family killed because of a piece of garbage."

I nodded. "How's Johnny?"

"I swear, he's the only reason you're even talking to me," Jeff rolled his eyes, "if you like kids so much, make your own."

I turned to kick him.

He laughed when I added calmly, "can't afford it,"

"Well, he had a bit of fever last week - Nat obviously freaked out -"
"obviously," I nodded sarcastically. "But he's alright."

"That's good,"

"Yeah," He agreed. "He grew since you last saw him, I think,"

Jeff hugged Nat. "From Todd," He said, then he kissed her.

"That's not from me," I said, sitting on the couch, and she laughed while fixing her head scarf.

"You're taking care of Johnny?" Nat called to me, being pulled after Jeff to hopefully show him how he can help, and not for any other reason.

"Sure," I called back, moving to sit beside him.

He was on the carpet, pushing his toys around, baby sounds coming from his mouth at times, as if he's telling a story.

"Hey, kiddo," I murmured.

He really did grow since I last saw him - around three months or so - and now I could actually imagine him growing and turning into a man someday.

He had clear blue eyes, identical to Nat's.

Johnny noticed me, and his small hands grabbed my knees to sit up. I held him gently, supporting him, and he started chatting - probably about the stuffed lion that lay beside him.

"How's work going?" I asked as Nat got back out to the living room, braiding her long hay coloured hair. She called me a few weeks ago on Friday, just before Sabbath, and begged me to read that article she wrote for her new job. Jeff told me on the way that she for two days asked everyone she knew to read or hear parts of it, that the only reason she stopped was the weekend.

"It's alright," she sighed, "they liked it."

"Of course they did," I let Johnny get up, supporting him so he won't fall on his way to his mother.

"No, that's not food, baby-" Nat said, pulling her skirt from his little fist, and she flared at me with desperation as if asking, really? Couldn't you hold him longer?

I shrugged. "Any of your siblings are coming?"

"Well," she said, "Mat said there's no he's coming with the kids, Rachel and her husband said they'll go to his parents, Noah's in the middle east until October, and Dan said he won't come if none of the others

does. Then no."

I rolled my eyes. "Maybe if you and Jeff stop try to set us together,"

"I still dont get why." she sighed, "you'd make such a sweet couple,"

"Pretty sure he hates me," I said, gently tickling Johnny as he tried to sit on me. Johnny nearly fall again, laughing.

"He does not-"

"Doesn't matter," I said, "you know, on your wedding he told me he'd never want to date me because 'he's not good with introverts'."

Nat laughed out loud. "Really?"

I shrugged. "Told him it's alright, because I'd never date a blond guy."

"You did not say that," she rolled her eyes. There was a knock on the door.

"True, but he did," I said, letting her grab Johnny from my lap. "Tell you brother to stop bullying me,"

Nat rolled her eyes, "Yeah, sure," she said. "Go make sure Jeffrey doesn't ruin the challah,"

So I did, just in time to hear my mother's voice.

"Natalie, you look so beautiful,"

"Hiding?" Jeff whispered to me, smirking.

I nodded.

"There, eat some apple,"

The conversation didn't last long. Pretty quickly we could hear Nat's voice telling my parents that, "just a moment, he's in the kitchen."

"That's our sign," Jeff winked.

"That's your sign," I replied, but then I brushed my hair back with my fingers and followed him. Mum was already hugging him. "Here is my wonderful son," she said.

"Heard you got the promotion," my dad shook Jeff's hand.

"I did, father, last week," Jeff confirmed.

Mum looked into the apartment, which must've been the reason she noticed me. "Darling," she said.

"Mum," I replied, my fingernails digging into my thighs through my jeans pockets. "Hey,"

I was out of there by eight thirty. I don't want to talk about it.

There was a knock on the door.

I emptied my glass, leaving it on the floor before making the step and

a half to open the door. I was walking there in circles for most of the past twenty minutes or so.

I took a deep breath, and I opened the door, and I collapsed on Neil.

"Hey," I murmured into his neck.

"Hi," Neil replied, resting one hand on my back. "You're alright?"

I nodded. "Missed you."

"I missed you, too," I could feel him leading me inside the apartment. "How was at your brother's?"

"Fine," I was forced onto the couch. He sad beside me. "I missed you."

Neil laughed, "I know," He said, "I missed you, too,"

"M'glad, cause you... I- I really need you, ya know?"

"I'll get you a glass of water, okay?" He said softly. His fingers ran through my hair. I wanted to throw up. "Then you'll take me what's up, okay?"

I nodded. He got up, and I fall on the couch, now laying on my side.

"I like water,"

"Yeah?" Neil called from the kitchen.

I nodded. "But I always forget so I just drink a lot of tea but I always forget to drink water,"

He laughed.

"Neily,"

"Yeah?" He called back, moving a little so I could see him.

"That sweater's very pretty on you,"

He wore the same green sweater from Friday.

"Thank you," He smiled. I felt my heart stopping. He knelt beside me. "You don't look bad yourself,"

"I do," I found myself murmuring, "white don't look good on me,"

"You look very handsome," Neil said, "sit up?"

I sat, taking the glass from him, drinking slowly.

"Hope you didn't come home like this," Neil said, pushing my head up so I could look at him. I wanted to thank him. His eyes locked on mine, and I didn't make a sound for a few long seconds.

"How d'you wanted me to get back?" I whispered eventually.

He rolled his eyes. "You're insane," He said, and he pulled me into half a hug. He stroke my hair again, and even through the waves of drunkenness I could feel his confusion, could feel him turning his head to my direction again. "You cut your hair?"

I nodded.

"When?"

"Earlier,"

"Why?"

I shrugged. "My dad said I look gay," I whispered. "I kinda hate it, but at least I didn't cut my ear off,"

He let out a silent sad laugh that sounded like a sigh. "I'll help you fix it later, alright?"

"Thanks,"

I don't know why my eyes watered in the first place, but suddenly I couldn't stop the tears.

Second breakout in less than a week. Maybe I should've counted them.

"Hey, shh," Neil whispered, his arms gently pulling me close to his chest. "What happened? It's the hair?"

"N- no," I cried.

"Then what happened?"

"You're too perfect,"

"What?" He held me closer as I tried to pull away.

"N- Neil, don't- don't you see it?" I tried to pull away again, to hold his face. "Why are you even my friend?"

Our eyes locked. He swallowed. "See what?" He whispered eventually.

"That you're diamonds! And I- I'm not. I'm barely 5.98$. N- Neil, you gotta realise that, y- you deserve better. You should go, y- you need to go, Neil,"

"Todd, cal-"

"No! Don't you get it? You deserve better than me, s- so you gotta go, cause-"

"Will you shut up for a second?" Neil laughed.

My mouth shut closed.

"I'm not diamonds, okay?" He gently moved my hands from his face, and he pushed my hair back from my face. I stared at him. "And you're not 5.98$ - god, where did you even brought that from. You're awesome, okay? And I love you, and I'm not going anywhere right now, get this into your head,"

I nodded. "Okay,"

"Yeah?"

"Yeah,"

"You're really drunk, mh?" He whispered.

I nodded.

"Why do you think you worth 5.98$?"

"My dad-" I started. Neil covered my mouth.

"I don't think I like your dad," He said.

"S'alright," I muttered into his hand, "Don't like him either,"

Neil smiled, and I melted between his hands.

"Then who do you believe? Your dad - who you don't even like - or me, your genius and very handsome best friend?"

"You," I sighed.

"Thank you."

"Chris's my best friend by the way,"

"Oh, shush," he rolled his eyes. I laughed, looking at him again.

His eyes met mine again. Brown and beautiful, sincere.

"I'm serious, you're priceless," Neil said.

"I'm gonna kiss you now, okay?" I replied.

Neil nodded. I don't remember anything after our lips met.

Chapter End Notes

This is NOT a slow burn

Also alternative name for this chapter is "the chapter I realised I know nothing about my religion and read a lot about it and then didnt use anything from it"

Ugh I had a draft of the ending that really fitted the name but i ripped it💔 you'll have to live with this version i wrote in the car 💔💔

Chapter 6: Until the Night

Chapter Notes

heyyy
fsdhjk i feel like i didnt post a chapter in forever (i blame sukkot because i usually write in school and i wasnt there for almost a month💔)
ugh it was so weird writing in 1st person tho im never doing it again

so like, chris is a bit of an asshole in this chapter... yes it has smth to do with knox... (HE DIDNT DO ANYTHING THIS TIME I SWEAR HES JUST RELATED TO THIS)
but ginny!!! shes here!!! and im gonna write a short fic about her and charlie because there're like 15 billy joel songs that are about them (they are spotify told me)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

"Wow, how sexy, Todd," Chris commented sarcastically when I stepped out of my room. "Was that for your guest last night?"
I rolled my eyes. "Ha ha,"
My sweater was forgotten on the floor of my bedroom, and the two upper buttons of my shirt where open. My hair was messy in it's new haircut.

"Saw your friend Neil last night," she added.
"Where?"
"*Here*."
"Right." I filled a glass with water, and I turned back to look at her. "Where were you last night?"

"Studying." Chris replied. She sounded on edge. I returned to my room to read.

It wasn't a long time between the moment I walked into the bar and to the point where Charlie trapped me in his arms. Well, maybe trapped is not the right word, but his arm was warped around my shoulders for ten long seconds, and I get to choose the words i use in my story.

"Hey," He said.

"Hey," I replied. "Is Neil alright? You sai-" "he's alright." Charlie cut me off. "Having an identity crisis or something."
These were the words he used on the phone - "identity crisis," - and though I know he was probably being dramatic, I couldn't help but fear that it had something to do with, well, this night.

"Come on in, come on in," Charlie said, like it was his house, while leading the way deeper inside. We sat beside a beautiful brunette girl, and Charlie - very much not subtly - glanced at her. she sat with a friend, both holding what looked like play scrips. Her friend whispered something, her voice low, probably something like, "look at that creep, the one staring at you." And the girl laughed, looking over at Charlie for a moment with a smile. "Hey,"

"Buy yourself a drink or something," He muttered to me, returning a wave.

"It's three fifteen," I replied. "Let's get you out of here, alright?"

"Sure," Charlie nodded, blinking. "Let's go,"

Once we were outside, Charlie lit a cigarette with an exhale. "Isn't she beautiful?" He asked.

"Yeah, I guess." I shrugged. "What's her name?"
"Aphrodite,"
"Careful, the gods may hear,"

"She came 'few times already," Charlie explained. "I think I'm in love, Todd. I think- my heart's beating so fast, I can feel it in my throat, I- I think it's gonna explode or something."

"You can't fell in love with someone you only saw, Charlie," I rolled my eyes.

"It's much more than just looks, Todd, I swear," Charlie pressed his hands on his face for a moment before continuing. "She's beautiful, but it's much more than that. It- it's how she moves, how she talks. Todd, I swear, she walked that first night into the bar, and I've never played this good in my life."

He looked at me, and I looked at him, and I sighed. "Then why don't you ask her out?"
He took a drag of his cigarette, asking, "like you asked Neil out?"

"He told you?"
"Don't worry, I got it out of him with a gun to the head."

I rolled my eyes. "Talk to her, at least make sure she doesn't have a boyfriend."

"You sound like Neil," He complained, but he grabbed my wrist, pulling me back inside, back to the brunette by the bar. I could hear him muttering "carpe diem," under his breath.

"Hey," He told her, "you come here often?"

Something sparkled in her eyes, as if she was fighting back a smile or a laugh. "You know I do,"

"What's your name."
"Ginny," she said. "You're Charlie, right?"

He grinned, nodding. I started to leave, but he gripped tightened. "Wanna, uh, wanna go somewhere? Sometime?"

"Are you asking me out?" Ginny asked.

Charlie shrugged. "It can be platonic," He said, his tone telling everyone in the room that *god*, he hoped not.

"Charlie, I'm going," I told him again.
"Noo, I wanted to hear gossip about last night,"
"Gossip with Ginny." I moved his hand from my wrist. He sighed, but didn't argue.

"What's that play?" I could hear him asking as I walked away.
"Midsummer Night's Dream," Ginny answered. "I'm playing Heremia. You should come,"

I chose the longest path back home, which meant I also stopped at a bookstore. I turned back to leave - the path and bookstore I chose were both on the street where Neil lived, and how bad was my luck that I saw him, checking out a thick book.

For a moment I dared to hope that it wasn't really him, but I knew it was.

"Todd," his voice said, forcing me to look up and meet his eyes. He smiled softly. "Hey,"

"Hey," I moved closer to him, "what're you looking at?"
"IT," Neil said, showing me the book. "You read it?"

"No, not yet,"

Neil hummed, putting down the book again. I looked at him - he looked tired, almost numb. "You're alright?" I asked.
"Mh?"
"Alright?"
"Uh, yeah," He nodded.
"Charlie said you had an identity crisis,"

He laughed. "I'm fine." He added, "confused, I think,"

"Uh." We were silent. "Sorry about last night."

"I'm not," Neil shrugged. Our shoulders touched, and I could feel him moving. I remember how I loved feeling him moving - his arms brushing against mine when we walked close, the heat of his skin when he took my hand. You miss those things when you can't see a person all of a sudden.
If I knew, if I could've go back in time, I would've told the younger me to hold on to those. "You won't have him forever," I would've said, "carve his face in your memory, bottle his scent, his taste, his smile." I don't think I would've wanted to ruin the fun to younger me, but sometimes it's easier to think that.

Neil turned to another shelf, taking a different book. "Read this?" He asked, holding up a copy of In Cold Blood.
I nodded, watching him taking IT again.

"Let's meet sometime." He said suddenly. "I mean, purposely. And talk."
"Y- yeah, sure,"
"Okay,"
"Alright," I nodded.

"I, uh, I'll go pay," Neil said. "Tomorrow's fine with you? Around eight?"
"Sure,"
"Alright." He nodded, looking at me. I looked back at him, and before I knew he hugged me.

"Neil," I whispered, stroking his hair a little, "what are you doing?"
"Hugging my best friend," He replied. "Can't I hug my best friend?" But he kissed my head when he pulled away. "Tomorrow, eight pm," He

told me, "don't forget."
"I won't," I called after him, watching as he walked away. I turned on my heels, letting out a short sigh. My face were hot, and it almost burned when I stepped outside the bookstore to the cold wind.

"Jesus fucking Christ, Todd!" Chris called as the phone started to ring. "Can't your friends leave you alone for a minute?"

I got out of my room, mostly to shot her a look. She was moody the whole day, and when I returned home she was in her room, her face buried in one of her pillows. ABBA songs were playing loud enough to hear in my room, through two closed doors.

She held up her middle finger, not even looking, and I rolled my eyes, going to answer the phone.

"Hello? Chris?" A familiar voice asked.
"Chris, it's for you!" I called to her, then asked, "Knox?"
"Todd?" Knox asked. "What are you doing there?"
"I live here?"
"Shit, right,"

"Who's this?" Chris called from her room.
"It's Knox!"
"Tell him to fuck off!"

I sighed. "She's not home," I told him. "I'll tell her to call you when she's back."
"Yeah, sure," Knox agreed. The call ended.

"What's wrong with you?" I asked, leaning against her doorframe.
"Leave me alone, Todd," she muttered back.
"Chris-"
"I don't wanna talk about it, Todd. Go away,"
I went away.

Chapter End Notes

hey again
just wanted to say that i chose this name because im so funny and planned smth with it
also might (might!!) not write for a while because my brother has bar mizvah and i wanna make smth for him💔

anyway hope you enjoyed?
bye👋👋

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!